

BATH AND WELLS

nted by E.W. Haslehurst R.B.A.

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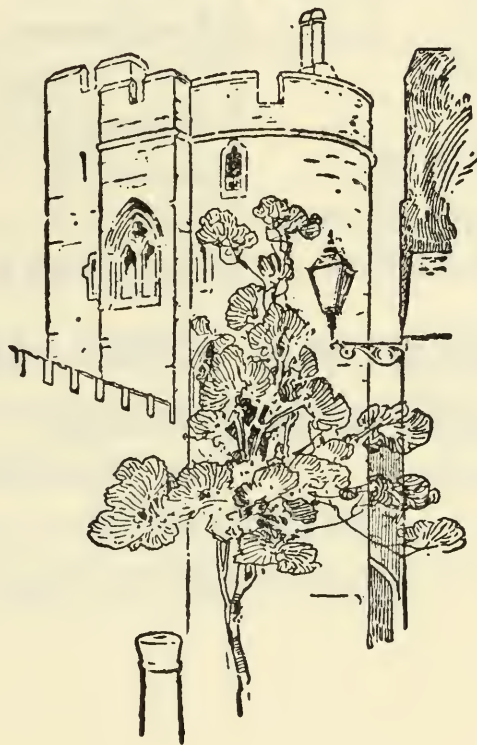
VIEW FROM THE NORTH PARADE BRIDGE, BATH

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BATH AND WELLS

Described by Arthur L. Salmon

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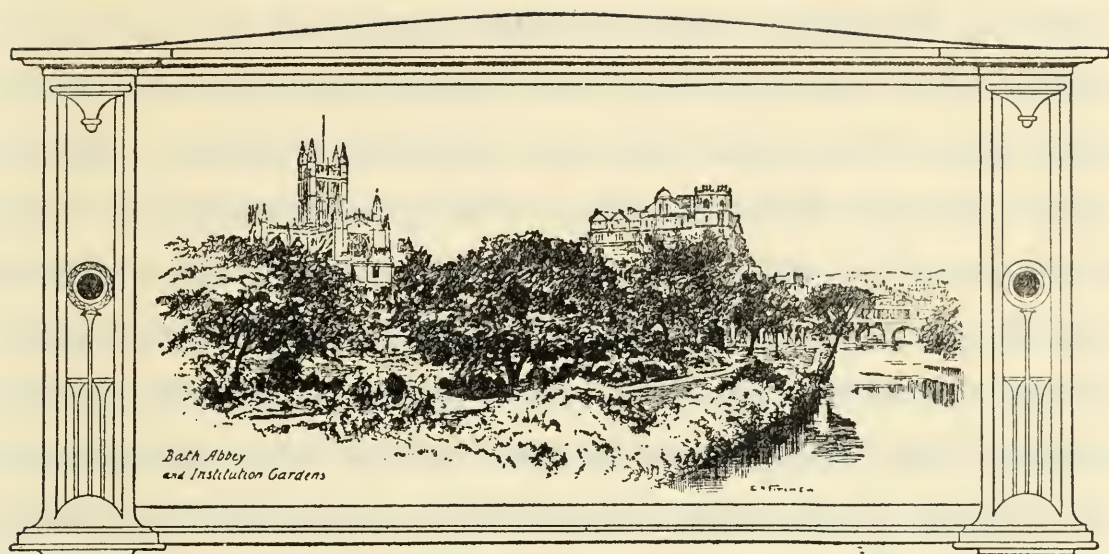
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Facing Page
View from the North Parade Bridge, Bath <i>Frontispiece</i>	
The Roman Bath	5
The Grand Pump-room and Abbey, Bath	12
Pulteney Bridge, Bath	16
Bath from Beechen Cliff	21
The Market Place, Wells	28
Wells Cathedral from the Springs	33
The "Bishop's Eye", Wells	37
The Palace Gatehouse and Drawbridge, Wells	44
Penniless Gate, Wells	48
Doorway of Chapel of St. Mary, Glastonbury Abbey	53
Glastonbury Tor from the Plain of Avalon	60



THE ROMAN BATH



BATH

It is no disrespect to Bath to say that its visitors have been more distinguished than its natives; it is to the city's enduring fame that so many famous visitors made it their permanent home. This town beside the placid Avon is still a fair place, and it was fairer before growth had brought its somewhat unattractive suburbs. It lies in a hollow among beautiful hills; its churches, terraces, and crescents, even as seen from the railway, are an alluring view, especially when evening is mantling them in its haze; we cannot pass through it without a stirring of the imagination, a conjuring of old ghosts. This is not the finest part of the river—to reach that we must go through Bristol to the Clifton gorge, where there is natural loveliness of entirely differing character, quite unrivalled of its

kind in England. Bath's hills have not the abruptness of this ravine; they are gentle and pastoral, and they give the town its own peculiar climate, which some persons find relaxing. There is generally a soft mist hovering above the roofs of those houses which the American novelist Howells thinks the "handsomest in the world"; there is often a touch of dream, of unreality, fitly clinging to a spot whose true life seems to belong to the past. However far we go back into the dimness of early British history, we find Bath already a recognized centre, a place of habitation; we have to explore romance instead of genuine record if we would know its origin.

Time has left the city much of its beauty, has increased its population, and has by no means stolen all its fashion; though we cannot expect a twentieth-century town to resemble an eighteenth-century spa. Fashion, though in some cases unlovely, is so far valuable here that it tends to preserve and adorn; decay is not necessarily beautiful. Bath can claim a high lineage, with much pomp and circumstance of event. It may even link itself with the fate of old Troy; for Bladud, its mythical prince, was a descendant of the Trojan Brutus, who is supposed to have landed at Totnes, extirpated the West-Country giants, and established his dynasty in the newly-named Britain. That Bladud was a leper who cured himself

by imitating the pigs that he saw washing themselves in Bath waters, belongs to the fairy tales of history, things which we neither assert nor positively deny; but it is interesting to lay some stress on two very modern features in his story—his cure by means of waters now stated to be radio-active, and his death by an attempt at flying, more than two thousand years too early. In English records it is usually thought sufficient to begin with the Romans; yet Bath was probably a place of some antiquity when the Romans came and discovered for themselves the value of its springs—a value, by the way, that is supposed to come from the eastern Mendips, whose drainage reaches the spot by percolation through a depth at which the water becomes heated. Physically, the Romans were a very clean people, especially in the late years when they were slowly losing their virility; and the luxurious elaboration of the bathing remains as a model or a warning.

It was in 1877 that excavations began which resulted in the revealing of these baths to their full extent. The chief or Great Bath is rectangular, 73 feet by $29\frac{1}{2}$, the water being about seven feet in depth, surrounded with dressing-rooms and steps; its floor is coated with heavy sheets of lead, on concrete and masonry. The gallery with its piers has been restored, not perhaps very happily, but the more ancient work

can easily be recognized. Articles found among the ruins may be seen in the Pump-room; other Roman remains are plentiful at the museum close by. Adjoining the larger bath is a fine circular bath; in addition to this and several others there were vapour and hot-air chambers. It may almost be said that what the Romans did not know about bathing is not worth knowing, even if they were not our masters in this as in some other respects. They reached Bath by important roads from Cirencester on the north, Silchester and Marlborough on the east, and Exeter on the southwest; and from Bath they had a road, apparently crossing the Severn at Aust, leading to Caerwent and Caerleon. Some of these roads are probably pre-Roman.

When we turn into the Abbey Churchyard to reach the Pump-room, it is interesting to remember that we are on the site of the old Roman forum, though the pavement of that space lay about twenty feet below the present surface. Bath has literally risen since those days. In the sixteenth century men had forgotten that the Romans used to drink the waters; it was supposed that they only bathed in them, and Dr. Jones, who in 1572 first recommended their internal use, may rightly be regarded as a discoverer. From that time the waters gradually gained in repute; the room built for their drinkers proved soon too small, and in 1796

the existing Pump-room was erected, with its Pindaric motto. More recent is the fine concert hall with its marble columns and gilded capitals, opening on a gallery that overlooks the great Roman bath. It must be confessed that those responsible achieved a very successful blending of the new with the old; and it is satisfactory that much excellent music can be listened to amidst such surroundings. For those who come here suffering from various ailments there is every accommodation, every possible comfort that their purses can afford to pay for; but many are attracted now who do not primarily come to "take the waters", and for these also there is ample welcome. But for those who flocked hither many years since, in the days of Bath's greatest fashion, we must turn to the pages of literature, to the inscriptions on some of the neighbouring houses that they occupied, or to the walls of the near Abbey Church where their inscriptions are so numerous. "Abbey" in this case is only a courtesy title: Wells claims the cathedral though it ranks second in the name of the diocese; Bath Abbey now is simply the parish church of Bath. It was a victory of the secular orders over the monks that made Wells the episcopal centre, for though in former times the Bishop was always Abbot of Bath, Bath now is merely an incumbency lying in the gift of the Simeon Trustees. It seems anomalous that so small a town as Wells

should have gained this precedence, but those who know and love the lesser town will not regret it. It is one of the picturesque discrepancies of the English Church. Bath and Wells long since parted company except in name; at Wells we find little but ecclesiasticism, while the tone of Bath is purely secular.

The Abbey dates from the time of the Mercian Offa, who founded a college of canons here in 775, afterwards dispossessed by Dunstan; and about two centuries later we gain some idea of the importance both of the Abbey Church and of Bath itself, by the fact that King Edgar was crowned here. In early Norman days we find John de Villula building a fine minster, of far greater extent than the present edifice, some small traces of which survive. Though there was a somewhat prolonged struggle for precedence, the rise of Wells proved the undoing of Bath, which also suffered severely from fires; so that the church fell into a sad condition of decay. It remained for Bishop King, at the close of the fifteenth century, to effect its partial restoration. The name of this bishop is specially connected with the external feature that most strikes visitors, the west front with its ladders of ascending and descending angels. This is often mistaken to be a representation of Jacob's dream; but it is not really the dream of the patriarch that it pictures, but a dream of Bishop Oliver King, who was translated from Exeter to Bath

and Wells in 1495. It is related that he was much impressed by the ruinous condition of the neglected abbey church, on a visit to the town, and that in his meditation thereon he "saw or supposed he saw a vision of the Holy Trinity, with angels ascending and descending by a ladder, neere to the which there was a faire olive tree, supporting a crowne, and a voice said, 'Let an Olive establish the crowne and a King restore the Church.'" By some play on words he interpreted this as a mandate to himself. Curiously enough, the angels are presented head downwards, and it is said that an eighteenth-century alderman had them decapitated lest their heads should fall upon him. As angels, they are certainly not attractive. The Reformation which shortly followed proved anything but a reformation of church building, and the partly reconstructed abbey had to wait a century before its completion by Bishop Montague, whose canopied effigy stands in the north aisle. The existing church has obvious defects and equally obvious beauties; but it conquers us at last in spite of some harsh criticism that a first view may call forth. It is a late specimen of Perpendicular, and fairly true to character; but the style was already in its decadence, and this example is supposed to prove that it needed no Reformation to kill Gothic architecture—that it was already dying. Be that as it may, the effect of its interior is nobly impressive, and some of the

detail, as in Prior Bird's Chantry, is fine. There is "snug lying in the Abbey", and its walls are covered, not to say defaced, by all manner of monuments to departed personages, mostly nonentities, whose number certainly proves how well "Bath waters serve to lay the dust". During Bath's days of greatest fashion the building was disfigured by wooden galleries, swept away by Sir Gilbert Scott nearly fifty years since. The crude cold light from which the church formerly suffered has been modified by stained windows of varying excellence. There are monuments by Flaxman, Chantry, and Nol-lekens; while of the mural literature visitors will chiefly notice Garrick's epitaph to the actor Quin and Dryden's to Mary Frampton; there is also a notable memorial of Lady Waller, wife of the Parliamentary general who was defeated, chiefly by the ardour of Cornish troops, at Lansdown Hill. Not only walls but floors are covered with names of deceased persons, very few of whom can be termed local; visitors from eastern and northern counties, from Ireland and Scotland, Barbados, France, Russia, Germany, came for the waters and stayed for their long rest. If we would form an idea of Bath's visiting list in its old popular days, we must go to the Abbey and read these inscriptions. They were wealthy persons for the most part; the poor could neither afford the waters nor the "snug lying", and perhaps did not suffer greatly by loss of either. It is



THE GRAND PUMP-ROOM AND ABBEY, BATH

a cosmopolitan crowd that we find here, and its memorials do not touch us so intimately as the simple headstones of a country churchyard; but they have their value and interest as introducing us to the Bath of two centuries since, a day when the healthy, the diseased, and the dying mingled at the festivities and "routs" of the neighbouring Pump-room, and when no year was complete to a stylish Londoner without his visit to Bath. But it is chiefly the undistinguished who lie in the Abbey; there are few names of real consequence among them; the city's more eminent guests have left other record.

After all, to get close to the spirit of old Bath we have to turn to the pages of literature—especially of eighteenth-century fiction and biography. We can go back earlier than this, for Chaucer gives us his "Wife of Bath", Spenser speaks of the "wondrous" town, and there is reason to think that Shakespeare himself acted here. Stone monuments are dead things; even the houses in which men have lived and died are dumb unless in a sense we bring their message with us. In a place like Bath, as with those natural scenes of which the poet spoke, "we find but what we bring"; a truth which may be exemplified at any time in these streets when we notice the unintelligent stare of many visitors as they read names inscribed on the walls of Bath houses. What does

the ordinary sightseer, the casual stranger, know of William Beckford, or Landor, or Richardson, or even of Jane Austen? But the names speak eloquently to the informed, to those who bring a love and knowledge of books with them; and if only one in a hundred really thrills at the reading of a familiar name above a Bath doorway, it was worth while to place the inscription. All has not yet been done that might be, in thus rendering these streets their own chronicle; but enough has been done to carry the understanding guest from one glad remembrance to another. If we turn off Pierrepont Street to the beautiful South Parade, now faced by the fine Catholic church of St. John the Evangelist, the loveliness of the view from its terrace may not be increased by a knowledge that notabilities of the past revelled in it, but certainly our own pleasure is heightened by that recollection. Southey thought this Parade the finest thing of its kind in the world; and if we do not care much for Southey, we shall at least delight to be told by Landor that "there were formerly as many nightingales in the gardens and along the river opposite the South Parade as ever there were in the Gardens of Shiraz". The nightingales have gone now, but not that memory. Dearer still, perhaps, will be the recollection that Walter Scott, then a small lame boy of four years old, stayed on this Parade with

his uncle in 1777—acquiring a perfect English accent, which, Lockhart tells us, he soon lost and never again recovered. It was thought that the Bath waters would benefit his leg, and he underwent “all the usual discipline of the pump-room and baths” for about a year, without any apparent advantage. Many years later he still recalled with pleasure “the beauties of the Parade, with the river Avon winding around it, and the lowing of the cattle from the opposite hills”. He tells us that his childish mind, unused to statuary, was much horrified by the “image of Jacob’s Ladder” on the front of the Abbey. If he came there now, he might listen to the Abbey bells chiming “Ye banks and braes” on one day each week, the remaining days being devoted to other popular melodies.

The North Parade is another fine block of buildings, and has its own cluster of memories. Wordsworth stayed here in 1841, when he came to Bath for the marriage of his daughter Dora; but Bristol is richer than Bath in its associations with the Lake Poets, though Coleridge preached here in the literal sense—not merely in the manner that was habitual to him. As guest of Lord Clare, Goldsmith came to the North Parade, and blundered one day into the wrong house by mistake; and Burke, another great Irishman, who had married a Bath lady, lingered here for some

months mourning her death, and the death of his son, before passing to Beaconsfield to die. These are notable memories, and Bath has so many such that it is impossible to speak of them all in a small book. Pierrepont Street, which adjoins both parades, has its recollection of Nelson; while some of Chesterfield's letters to his son were written from his own house close by. Here also is the house that the actor Quin chose as a good place "for an old cock to go to roost in"; and in the next dwelling lived the lovely Elizabeth Linley, fated to be immortalized by Reynolds and wedded by Sheridan. If we pass on to the Grand Parade, with its fine hotel conspicuous, and the music of the weir following us, we are reminded of old London by the fact that there are houses and shops on both sides of Pulteney Bridge. We are really in Bathwick when we cross the bridge—once an outlying hamlet, and now a suburb comparatively modern for Bath. The district, in its quiet dignity and solid architecture, retains much that is typical of its period, the close of the eighteenth century, and doubtless much credit is reflected on the architect Baldwin. Memories of the Pulteney family, who purchased the manor, are perpetuated in Great Pulteney Street, the finest in Bath; Laura Place and Henrietta Gardens give us the names of Henrietta Laura, Countess of Bath. Laura Chapel,



PULTENEY BRIDGE, BATH

East of the Bath proprietary chapels, was once almost as famous as the Octagon. Preachers at these chapels used to buy the incumbency and make the best profit for themselves that their popularity might bring; then as now, a fashionable preacher could draw as large a crowd as a popular actor. Mrs. Piozzi, who attended both chapels, speaks of being crowded at the Octagon "like seeds in a sunflower". Her name naturally reminds us of Dr. Johnson and of Boswell, who stayed at the Pelican (now the "Three Cups"), in Walcot Street. It was here that Johnson said of a certain lady whom he disliked, "It is better she should be reddening her own cheeks than blackening other people's characters". While on this Bathwick side of the river there are plenty of memories to engage us, in addition to the attractions of parks, Recreation Ground, and gardens. Bulwer Lytton wrote some of his later books while staying in Pulteney Street. Sydney Place is sacred to the memory of Jane Austen, though she stayed at different times in other parts of the town; it was hither that her father retired for his last years, and though she does not appear to have written much here, she thoroughly enjoyed Bath, and her observations bore good fruit in *Northanger Abbey*. Hers is a name by itself in our literature; but Fanny Burney, with gifts of somewhat coarser fibre, was also intimately associated with Bath.

In returning to more central Bath, something must be said for the two architects Wood, father and son, who in the middle of the eighteenth century were "planning squares and crescents, and rearing stately edifices, of which Bramante and Palladio might well envy both the dignity and beauty". There has been a good deal of "tall talk" about Bath, just as there is now a good deal of nonsense spoken of her being senile and decadent; but it cannot be denied that the town, architecturally as well as naturally, is really beautiful; some may not care for the style, but the magnificence in parts is undoubted. The Woods were certainly big men, even if too closely tied to classic models; and for a place like Bath fair imitations of the classic are decidedly better than sham domestic Gothic. These men, under the able patronage of Ralph Allen and others, did for the town's external appearance very much what Beau Nash did for its manners. In spite of its fashion, Bath had hitherto been dirty and ill-kept. Evelyn found its streets "narrow, uneven, and unpleasant"; and Pope did not find much good to say of the town, though he loved Prior Park. But when the elder Wood came from Yorkshire, in 1727, and at once set to work, a change began. It was to his conception and skill that we owe the two Parades, Gay Street, Queen Square, and the Circus. It is to his son that we

are indebted for the Royal, Lansdown, and Camden Crescent; and it was the son's work to execute his father's plan for the Circus, so immensely admired by Mr. Howells. Mr. Howells is only echoing former laudations; Landor thought the Circus the most perfect thing he had seen—"nothing in Rome or in the world is equal to it". Milsom Street, by which we may conveniently reach it, was formerly residential, but is now the most stylish shopping centre, and has really a touch of West-End London about it. Ladies from far and near resort hither to indulge their fancies or supply their necessities—Bath commerce by no means depends on Bathonians alone. What is now a gold and silver shop was once the famed Octagon chapel, in its best days thronged with fashionable worshippers. Herschel was organist here at the time when he discovered Uranus—he was living at the time in New King Street.

In the Circus we have not only a fine architectural achievement; there is also an abundance of great recollections. Here from 1755 to 1763 lived William Pitt, trying to gain health from the waters, and winning the admiring suffrages of his fellow townsmen, whose member he remained during ten years. Other political recollections cling to the spot; Clive lived here, and that unhappy Major André, whom the Americans executed as a spy. Here also lived the

girl whom Burke was to marry. There are notable associations in art as well; Gainsborough lived for fourteen years at No. 24, at a time when his fame reached its height. "All who were distinguished in the many-sided life of the day passed through Gainsborough's studio in the Circus." It was here that he painted Sterne and Richardson, Burke, Garrick, Sheridan, Foote, Quin, and the lovely Miss Linley. The recent Livingstone centenary reminds us that the noble explorer and missionary stayed at the Circus when in Bath, some forty-six years since. And thus, musing on memory after memory, we may pass from the Circus to the Royal Crescent, beloved of Fanny Burney, with its view of the more modern Victoria Park, and of the hills beyond the town. It cannot be denied that the Crescent is a fine thing in its way, admirably placed, with its noble sweep of lofty houses forming nearly a semicircle. Whatever its residential charms may be, the design is a triumph in its style, and it deserves its proud records, which range from Jane Austen to Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle. Bath has many associations with Dickens, one of the most interesting of which is his friendship with Landor, who lived at St. James's Square, near the Crescent, till driven thence and out of England by an action for libel; but somehow we think less of Dickens himself, in respect to localities, than



BATH FROM BEECHEN CLIFF

we do of the characters that he created. Perhaps it is not unfair to Dickens—it may indeed be a compliment—to say that the man himself interests less than his works; which is the exact contrary of what may be said of Dr. Johnson, for instance. The humour of *Pickwick*, in parts at least, has worn a little thin, and the scene of Mr. Winkle's exploits does not greatly thrill us. A different humorist, Kit Anstey, author of the *New Bath Guide*, was one of the first to take up residence in the newly-built Crescent, and throve so well here as to become the father of thirteen children. His inspiration appears to have declined as his family increased; perhaps he found that the “living poems” were best. We can pass into the spacious Victoria Park through the stately Royal Avenue, close to which the municipal band gives open-air concerts. The marble Canova vases here were designed as a gift from Napoleon to Josephine. The park was opened and named by the princess Victoria, who is commemorated in the tall obelisk at the second entrance. Quite the most pleasing among the artificial attractions of the spot is the small sheet of water, with its pretty bridge and its swans. The obelisk is one of those things that we are inclined to sneer at as Victorian—forgetting that, obelisks apart, the Victorian was a great age, in many ways more deserving our reverence than

our scorn. There were giants on earth in those days.

Weston and Lansdown may be reached by pursuing the Park, and at the Weston Road we are on the footprints of Romans, the Julian Way. But we have to strike off this highway of the legions if we would visit Lansdown Crescent, chiefly memorable now as containing Beckford House, once the home of the author of *Vathek*—"England's wealthiest son", as Byron styled him in days when huge fortunes were more rare. He was as impulsive in building as in literature, and after exhausting much of his wealth at Fonthill Abbey, came to Bath for less costly but hardly less fantastic indulgence. His collection of books became so large that one house in the Crescent was not enough to hold them; and other collections of his were actually historical in their importance. Beckford Tower, finely placed and a far-seen landmark, was raised in great haste, standing on ground that is now the Lansdown Cemetery and fitly contains the author's dust. If we want an eastern story of glowing imaginative heat, we can still turn to *Vathek* with pleasure, remembering that it won its writer what not many British authors have attained, a European reputation. Book-hunters know what a precious find is a copy of Mallarmé's reprint, in its original French version—Beckford can claim the additional distinction of having first written

his masterpiece in a foreign language. Looking from his tower at Lansdown, Beckford was able to see the tower of his other creation at Fonthill, and one morning he noticed that it had fallen. Very much that he created and collected disappeared in like fashion, but his name will not quickly perish from our records; he thought and acted in the grand style. A man great in different fashion is commemorated in the Grenville monument, which recalls the prowess of the noble Sir Bevil when his Cornishmen stormed Lansdown Hill, and routed the troops of Sir William Waller. Sir Bevil himself, and others among the flower of the West Country, died in that startling flash of success to the Royalist cause.

For some of Bath's richest literary associations we must pass through the town again, and emerge on its south-eastern side, climbing the hill to Prior Park. We can here gain fine views, not only in actuality but in retrospect. The estate once belonged to the priors of Bath and has since been again a Catholic settlement; but its great literary days belong to the time of Ralph Allen, whose glory it was to "do good by stealth and blush to find it fame". We remember him chiefly for that exquisite compliment paid him by his guest, the poet Pope, and for the fame of other visitors who came to him in this beautifully situated mansion; but he is memorable for his own sake, having

done great things for Bath, exploiting the value of its local stone, contracting for efficient postal services before the Government had taken all such ventures over, bringing Pitt to be the town's member and Wood to be its architect. Fielding, who lived for some time at Twerton, was a frequent guest of Allen's, whom he depicted in his *Squire Allworthy*; Thomson, of the *Seasons*, was so valued a visitor that a stone summer-house was built for his convenience; and Pope was here "in more leisure than I can possibly enjoy in my own house", when he completed the *Dunciad*. A lane leading to Combe Down is still known as Pope's Walk. Among other guests were Gainsborough and Smollett, who gave a vivid picture of fashionable Bath in *Humphry Clinker*. Bishop Warburton, by marrying Allen's niece, became heir to the estate. Sham Castle on Hampton Down was a freak of Allen's, built to delight his eyes from his town house before he removed to Prior Park; whatever we may think of it now, it was quite in contemporary taste. Such a man may be pardoned for a few whims; Bath can hardly be too grateful to the memory of Ralph Allen, and he was one whose benefactions were not without immediate reward. To the list of his visitors we may add the name of Beau Nash, the last king of Bath, that strange mixture of foppery, common sense, benevolence, and coarseness. Grant Allen speaks of him

as in the genuine line of Bath's elected royalty, in legitimate descent from the coronation of Saxon Edgar. So much has been written about this clever Welshman, who evoked social order and method from chaos, that there is no need to dwell on his story here. It is certain that by his reforms and his wholesome humanizing of manners in Bath he also exerted an influence on the metropolis as well, for Bath in his day became the second home of Londoners; we cannot ignore his share in the gradual refining of society that was notable towards the close of the eighteenth century. Like other discrowned kings, Nash suffered from neglect in his old age, but the corporation allowed him ten guineas a month, and when he died in 1761 he had something like a royal funeral in the Abbey.

We must retrace our steps a little if we would enjoy the fine view of Bath from Beechen Cliff. There are appropriately many "combes" in this district—that old Celtic word that has survived so long; Widcombe, Lyncombe, English Combe, Monkton Combe, all speaking of hollows among these beautiful verdant hills. Bath itself lies beneath us in a greater hollow, not to be left without a climb, its churches, squares, and crescents softened by haze or blurred by the smoke of passing trains. The railway treats Bath better than it does Bristol; a traveller passing through without alighting can still note the town's most striking

features, whereas in passing through Bristol he sees little but ugliness and dirt. The greater town has its own compensation, and indeed the two can hardly be regarded as rivals, so differing are their claims. Though scarcely twelve miles apart, they differ even in climate, and certainly in that more subtle atmosphere which is the essence of locality. Bristol, though lying at its verge, is the West Country metropolis; Bath itself seems somehow to miss the western flavour. Its hills, its surrounding villages, have the true character of Somerset; but Bath proper, the town that the Woods designed and Nash ruled, does not seem to belong distinctively to Somerset. There is little truly local about it—it is not racy of the soil; there is too much classicism, too much that is cosmopolitan. Even its personal memories are not chiefly of local men; it was not men of Somerset that gave the town its position. There is a Roman town lying beneath these more modern streets; in some dim way the old asserts itself still; we seem treading ghostly Roman pavements, meeting phantoms of the legionaries. Strangers came and made their home here; the more notable Bathonians were not truly men of Bath. It is not an old English town that we see before us, as Bristol is still in parts, as Exeter and Winchester and Canterbury are; it is a composite growth of Latin luxury and eighteenth-century fashion. Bath never strikes one

as a typical county town—as Salisbury, for instance, is typical of Wiltshire; it is something greater, perhaps, more wide in its horizons, more varied and national in its associations; it belongs to the country at large, and is not the child of any one corner of it. There is gain in this—the local mental tone is less provincial, less rustic and ruled by prejudice; but there is loss also, a defect of local colour, of picturesque angularities and eccentricities. Let no Bath-lover resent these words; such as it is, we would not have Bath different. It is only the central town that has this metropolitan touch about it; a mile takes us into characteristic pastoral and wooded English seclusions. This central town, in its own way, is a gem not easily to be matched elsewhere; we must go to Cheltenham or Buxton for comparisons, and they do not equal it. This was the town that Landor loved, that Scott remembered with affection, and of which Swinburne could sing:

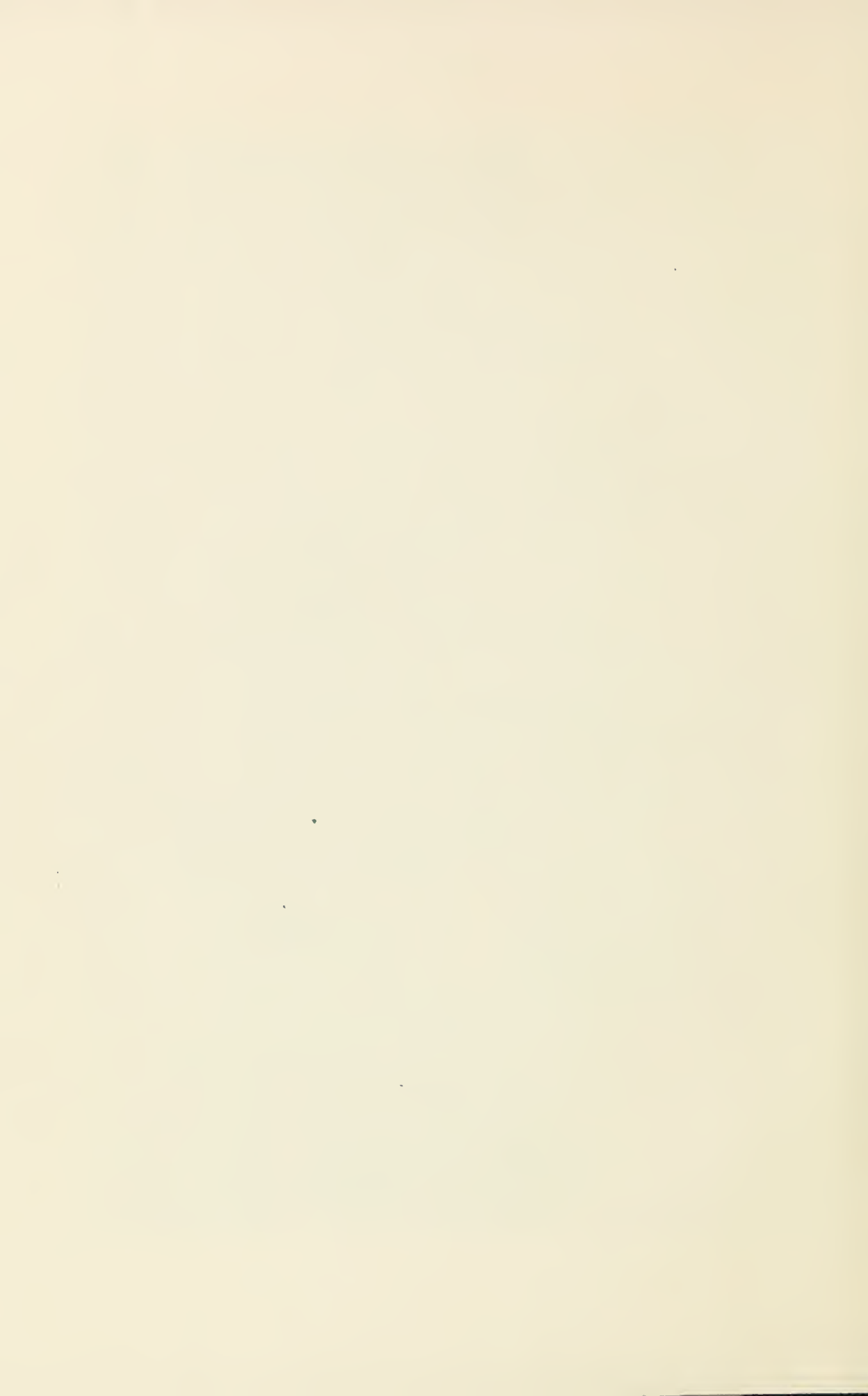
City lulled asleep by the chime of passing years,
Sweeter smiles thy rest than the radiance round thy peers;
Only love and lovely remembrance here have place.
Time on thee lies lighter than music on men's ears;
Dawn and noon and sunset are one before thy face.

The beautiful language may have more sweet sound than actual meaning—in these moods, we go to Swinburne chiefly for his melody. But we must not make the mistake of supposing, as some do, that Bath is

really "lulled asleep", that its life is wholly in the past, that it is like a faded crone who was once a virgin of charms. The Bath of a century since has gone entirely, except in the buildings that remain; watering-places by the sea now draw the pomp and circumstance of our fashion. But Bath is thoroughly alive, and has wide eyes to greet the suns of the twentieth century; she still draws cultured residents and admiring visitors. It is certain that in this brief survey much has been omitted which would be expected in a larger work, but the Bath shops offer a large selection of guidebooks, many of them admirable; and enough has been done if something of the atmosphere of the place has here been caught. Some more names there are, certainly, that ought to be mentioned in connection with Bath, though here again they are names that belong to the nation at large and are not strictly local. Walpole, the Napiers, Crabbe, Bishop Butler, Wilberforce, General Wolfe—they are all of significance in our annals; and the visiting list might include many royalties, not only British but French sovereigns. These are the recollections in which guidebooks delight; they have their rightful place. Somehow the literary memories seem the more vital, and that prevailing flavour of old Rome that lingers around the Baths. Social doings have had more to do at Bath than national



THE MARKET PLACE, WELLS



history; the arts of peace have flourished rather than the science of war. Bath has not played a great part politically, though many statesmen and kings have walked her streets. She has attached her name to different things of social use, such as Bath Chairs, and Bath Buns, Bath Olivers, and the immortal tea-cake known from its first vendor as Sally Lunn. The buns and biscuits may still be procured, and the Bath chair if one desires that mode of conveyance; but taxicabs and motors now rush through those streets where these luxuries were first named; the new spirit of movement pervades Bath from end to end. One advantage of the newer methods is the speed and convenience with which we can now be transported to the various delightful places that make Bath so fine a centre; many of the most attractive parts of Somerset and Wiltshire are within an easy day's excursion.

The whole of this district is full of loveliness and charm—a charm of the past, and an ever-present beauty; and it is easily reached from Bath, which is excellently provided with the means of pleasant excursions. But a stranger, wilder district lures us onward, the great highland of the Mendips, beyond which nestles Wells, and beyond again “the island-valley of Avilion”. In the solitude of the hill country we seem far removed indeed from the atmosphere of

Bath—from that settlement of human beings that was already old when the Romans found it; the fair ladies and fashionable fops of its gay assemblies would have felt utterly desolated on these grim heights, in days when every mountain was spoken of as “horrid” and even forests were not too fondly loved. We have come nearer to nature since those times; she speaks to us more intimately, we do not so dread her solitudes or shudder at her steep places. But even those stylish and perhaps frivolous loiterers at “the Bath” must have been struck with wonder and some sense of happy awe, when they emerged on the brow of the Mendips and gazed from Milton Hill at the cradled beauties of Wells, with the high Tor of Glastonbury beaconing in the far distance.

WELLS

Mr. W. H. Hudson has coupled Bath and Wells as among the very few English towns that he could bear to live in; but he places Wells first. It fills him with joy when he sees it from afar. To see it best, we should approach by road rather than by rail; the railway very properly keeps at some little distance, and does not blunder loudly upon its sweet

seclusion. The stations are not too far for convenience, but just distant enough to show a decent respect. Sometimes it seems almost an absurdity to call Wells a town at all; its appearance is more that of a large village. But if we come on a market day we find a fair amount of bustle; if we come on a holiday we find the streets thronged with sightseers; and on Saturday nights, even in winter, the marketplace is quite alive with a lingering, talkative crowd, the shops are brightly lit, and generally a band is playing. There is also a picture house, that last proof of advanced civilization. But this is the Wells of to-day, rather than the Wells of yesterday and let us hope of forever. That is a spot of religious peacefulness and learned ease, delightful for those who love not the ways of hustle and noise; it is a Sleepy Hollow with a pervasive atmosphere of dream, not stagnant but eminently soothing and healing. There is a perpetual charm of running waters; if we lie in one of the lovable old houses of the marketplace, we shall hear this sound as the ever-present accompaniment of our drowsiness as we fall asleep at nights, the fresh clear music to which we wake at dawn—this and the rich chime of the cathedral clock.

It is obvious to the most casual visitor that Bath and Wells, though linked ecclesiastically, are utterly dissimilar in character and appearance; they have also

been entirely unlike in history. There is a resemblance in name, inasmuch as both names have a watery origin—like many other town names. Though so much more mediaeval than Bath, whose prevailing atmosphere, apart from its Roman relics, is Georgian, Wells is really far less ancient as a spot of habitation; for dim antiquity we must go to Glastonbury, about five miles distant. No Roman settlement can be proved at Wells, though the Romans actively worked the Mendip lead mines and the Fosse Way is not far off. The town is distinctly English, or rather Saxon, in the historic sense that distinguishes English from British. While the river Axe remained as the recognized border between the conquests of the West Saxons and the still resisting Britons (whom Freeman liked to call the Welsh), the site of Wells was within British territory, and it continued thus till the border was removed to the Parret. The men of Wessex seem to have become attached to Somerset as residents rather than as vindictive conquerors; and when Ine, early in the eighth century, raised Taunton as a vanguard stronghold of his kingdom, he chose this grassy level at the foot of the Mendips for the site of a companion abbey to the Celtic Glastonbury. Wells is thus entirely Saxon in its origins, and has remained entirely ecclesiastic. Unlike Bath, its civic life has always run on very limited lines; it





WELLS CATHEDRAL FROM THE SPRINGS

has just been a small town dependent on clerics, a cluster of houses round a great church. The ever-flowing springs that gave the town its name, and the fertility of the soil, made the choice of situation a happy one; and Mr. Edward Hutton, in his recent admirable book on Somerset, still finds the characteristic expression of Wells one of beatitude and joy.

The first settlement here was collegiate rather than what we strictly understand as monastic; its clergy were canons, not monks; and this feature continued, contrary to the experiences of Bath and Glastonbury, with which the fortunes of Wells were long and intimately bound. The bishop-stool was at Sherborne; it was not till the division of 909 that Wells became head of the Somerset diocese. The church of that date has gone completely, together with most of the records of its apparently uneventful history. There was long much doubt as to which of the three should attain ultimate supremacy. About the year 1090 John de Villula, succeeding Giso in the bishopric of Wells, made his great attempt to render Bath the head of the see, so that Bath Abbey became for a time the actual cathedral. The canons of Wells seem to have been somewhat badly used, but they were later given a share in the election of bishops; however, Bath remained the cathedral town for about a century, while Glastonbury was a prosperous and powerful abbey. It

was fated that Bath should ultimately become supreme in secular position, and that Glastonbury should remain simply monastic. Bath won the distinction of figuring first in the title of the diocese, but to Wells soon reverted the foremost position, and there it has remained ever since. Giso had tried to render Wells monastic, but the effort failed; Somerset's great minster was to belong to the secular, not the regular orders.

Though nothing remains of the Saxon building, it is probable that some traces of its position may be guessed from the existing architectural arrangement of the cathedral, whose scheme we owe to the twelfth-century Bishop Reginald. Fifteen years after his death, Jocelyn, a native of Wells, came to the bishopric, and to him is due that fine western façade whose sculpturings have been variously interpreted, and which has been spoken of as a *Te Deum* in stone. The whole is a great pageant of sacred and secular history, grouped around the Coronation of the Virgin, which was probably its central motive. We have to thank Bishop Reginald for the earliest perfect specimen of Early Gothic in England; he was the creator of the present nave, transepts, and choir; but neither he nor Jocelyn gave us the exquisite Lady Chapel, or the fine chapter-house, both of which belong to the fourteenth century, while the two western towers are Perpendicular of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth.

The central tower, no longer strictly a lantern, is earlier, being a rebuilding in the Decorated period of a tower overthrown by earthquake. The inverted arches within were added in 1338, because the great lantern was found to be too ponderous for its piers; the arches were ingeniously designed as a kind of ornamental underprop, but though their unique character may impress uncritical visitors, they are really a blemish rather than a beauty. With regard to the façade itself, there have been differing opinions. Freeman condemned it, in spite of its wonderful sculptures, as a thoroughly bad piece of architecture—bad because it is “a sham—because it is not the real ending of the nave and aisles, but a mere mask, devised in order to gain greater room for the display of statues”. Such condemnation denotes a lack of imagination on the part of the historian, a limited and pedantic view; we may rather agree with Dean Plumptre, who was content to “admire, reverence, and love a thing that is beautiful in itself, for the sake of its beauty”. Mr. Hudson also, who never forgets human things in his love of bird life, has said of Wells that the cathedral “is assuredly the loveliest work of man in this land, supremely beautiful, even without the multitude of daws that make it their home, and that may be seen every day in scores looking like black doves perched on the stony heads and hands and shoulders of that

great company of angels and saints, apostles, kings, queens, and bishops, that decorate the wonderful west front". We have to remember that the vast frontal was once far more decorated than it is now, being glorified with diverse rich colourings; though this, it may be supposed, could only enhance its defect in the eyes of the rigid purists. But we should also remember that this west front was never intended as a chief entrance to the minster—it was more like a huge external reredos, if such a term may so be used, a grand screen or altar-piece fronting the sunset with its perpetual imagery of adoration. It was an anthem in stone, a manifest worship of the divine beauty, the seen adoring the unseen. In a sense, also, as another writer has pointed out, it is a mediaeval picture book, a setting forth of ecclesiastic and historic record in obvious outline and symbol. It is interesting to find that two noted American visitors, Mr. Howells and Mr. Henry James, have been deeply impressed by this Somerset minster—Mr. James in particular lingering to gaze at the marvellous frontal. Wells has an almost unique charm for Americans, being so entirely archaic in its features, so utterly unlike anything Transatlantic, so solemn, chastened, and yet joyful. It is fortunate that the cathedral has a fine open space for its approach, and is not crowded upon by streets and secular buildings. Reaching it from



THE "BISHOP'S EYE", WELLS

the marketplace, as most visitors do, there is ample leisure for viewing the massive front. Yet, however much we admire this front, there are other aspects of the church undeniably more lovely; and a distant view from the hills is perhaps most impressive of all. Wells does not wear all its beauty on its front, and no single view of the minster or its precincts is really an adequate representation. Every side must be examined for the whole to be appreciated. We must linger around it peacefully and lovingly, noting quiet details, letting the bird-song and sunlight of summer sink into our hearts, or the dreamy haze of autumn; we must loiter pensively by the moat of the palace or in the seclusion of the Vicars' Close, or among the small temporary activities of the marketplace, feeling throughout that the cathedral dominates everything, though without assertive or obtrusive arrogance. The precincts are the soul of the little town, the cathedral is its holy of holies; whatever be our faith, the place is meaningless without this keynote. It is something deeper than mere artistic beauty, something that more definitely voices our craving for the spiritual. If we come to Wells as a mere dead museum or picture gallery, we miss its spirit; we must come to it as to something intensely human on the higher side of humanity—its longing to escape from the simply material and transient. Man expresses these things

differently in different ages; this was his mode of utterance in days when his faith was more concrete, more dogmatic, more beautiful in its externals, if not more vital. The mediaeval and feudal are dead in most senses to-day, but we find them alive still when we come to the old cathedrals and the quiet village churches. Feeling this, in no undue haste, we may enter fitly at the exquisite north porch, and learn what the church's interior has to say to us.

This beautiful porch is Early English—or rather transitional, as it retains traces of Norman ornament; it belongs to the time of Bishop Robert, whose church was smaller than that designed by Bishop Reginald. Robert's church, in fact, was probably a Normanized amplification of the Saxon minster, and something of its nature has survived even the extensive additions of Bishops Reginald and Jocelyn. A characteristic of the nave is that it appears higher than it is—Wells is among the smaller of English cathedrals. It also gives an impression of greater length. There are more beautiful naves in England, but the effect is admirable and much of the detail deserves careful study. Especially good are the two chantries, of Bishop Bubwith and Hugh Sugar, both Perpendicular, which of course are now only chantries in name; perhaps they have been too much desecrated to common uses. There are also chapels of Holy Cross and St. Edmund under the

south and north-western towers; so that this nave, small as it is, had at least four subsidiary chapels. There is much humour in the decoration of the capitals, as elsewhere in the cathedral—the jests of many centuries since are constantly peeping out at us from among the foliage and other adornment, in that wonderful manner in which the Gothic imagination blended the grotesque and the reverent. This is not an occasion for indulging in architectural controversy or exposition; there are many excellent books accessible to provide these, and the visitor is given a printed card with leading features. But there must be a discrimination in our admiring; we cannot be expected to love the sixteenth-century pulpit, or the great inverted arch that obtrudes itself in the vista from west to east. The transeptal arches of similar design may more easily be forgiven, for they are less intrusive. We may be amused but are not greatly edified by the famous astronomical clock, constructed for Wells by a monk of Glastonbury; yet this remains the most vivid memory of a visit to Wells in the minds of many, not only children. There is usually a small group, sometimes quite a crowd, gathered in the north transept just before the hour strikes, to see the racing horsemen, and the seated figure kicking out the quarters. But better things than this are close at hand. There is the very beautiful choir to be entered, with its lovely

retro-choir and Lady Chapel, making this one of the finest east-ends of all our cathedrals. This portion is of the fourteenth century, and the glass of the eastern window is of the same date. It seems a pity that nave and choir should be so completely separated; what would be a noble view from the western end is largely obstructed; in the nave we are too utterly shut out from the sanctuary. Whatever it may be musically, it is a mistake for the organ to occupy its central position; surely the dividing screen between choir and nave should always be of light woodwork, a division but not a blind exclusion. But this defect is not characteristic of Wells; it is shared by other cathedrals, and doubtless has its apologists. Special attention should be paid to the misereres, which are of early date and remarkably interesting for their fantastic carving. On the north, close to the presbytery, is the tomb of Bishop Beckington, whose canopy has unhappily been removed to the chapel of St. Calixtus, by which is the fine alabaster monument of Dean Husee. If we have a combination of faith and toothache, we may touch the incised slab of Bishop Bytton (thirteenth century) for a cure, remembering the grotesque figure in the south transept of one who apparently failed to find this remedy. There is much else to delay us here, but we must pass up the picturesque flight of old steps to the octagonal Chapter-house. We should first look

into the crypt, or more correctly undercroft, which is quite a museum of ecclesiastical curiosities. The staircase itself is worthy of the very fine Chapter-house to which it leads, and which of itself would place Wells high among cathedrals. Its most striking feature, the central clustered column, resembles that of Salisbury. It is like a spreading tree supporting the roof, its branches meeting the vaulting shafts of the walls. The building is late thirteenth century, belonging to the style known as geometric Decorated, but has none of the stiff formality that we associate with things geometrical; it is indeed one of the glories of Wells. By crossing the transepts we reach the eastern door to the cloisters—there is another entrance at the west end. These were never strictly cloistral, as there were no monks to use them. Above is the chapter library. The churchyard was the burialplace of the canons; and we must remember that the great green surrounding the west front was of old time a graveyard for the people of Wells. Similarly, the College Green at Bristol was anciently a grave-ground. There was a Lady Chapel in this cloistral graveyard of Wells, destroyed by the Puritans who did such damage to the episcopal palace.

We can reach this exquisite residence either from the cloisters, or from the marketplace through the "Bishop's Eye". Its most characteristic outward feature is the beautiful moat that shuts it away from us,

crossed by a drawbridge at the gatehouse, and fed by the St. Andrew's Well which springs in the garden—also the source of the water in the market-square fountain, supplying the needs of Wells townsfolk before the day of water companies. It was Bishop Beckington who gave this fountain to the people. Being the permanent residence of its bishop, it is natural that the house is not open to visitors, but admission to the gardens may sometimes be gained; most, however, have to be content with a peep when the gate is opened—though, if they come at the right time, they may see the swans swim to the gatehouse and ring a bell as a signal that they want their dinner. Turning to old Leland, we find him speaking quaintly enough of the place; telling us that “the area afore the Bishop's Palace lyith est of the market-stede, and hath a fair high waul toward the market-stede, and a right goodly gate-house yn it, made of late by Bishop Beckington, as it apperithe by his armes. On the south side of this area is the Bishop's Palace, dichid brodely and waterid about by the water of S. Andre's streame let into it. The haul of the Palace ys exceding fayre.” The gentleman who complained that Chaucer's spelling is defective might have made the same remark of Leland, but he is one of the most graphic of describers. There was formerly a fine quadrangle here, of which the existing palace, the work of Bishop Jocelyn, formed

the eastern side. Though built later, the great hall is now ruinous, having been dismantled by Sir John Gates in 1552. The Palace having passed to the Protector Somerset from the hands of the reforming Barlow, Gates appears to have purchased it after the Duke's beheadal, and is said to have broken up the hall for sake of its valuable lead and timber. What was left of its frame was used for repairing his deanery, by the Puritan Burgess. From without the garden, the fairest aspect of the palace is its north side, abutting on the moat with leafy walls and graceful oriels; sweetened with the perpetual flow of water, the air often thick with bird-notes. Of those who have been bishops here we remember some for far other reasons than their connection with Wells. Thus, Wolsey appears to have done nothing but enjoy the temporalities of the diocese, yet Wells must at one time have been proud of the great pluralist. Laud was bishop for less than two years, and probably resided here scarcely at all—he was too busy a man in London; but his also is a name, historically, to be reckoned with, and to remember in these episcopal precincts. But of Bishop Ken our remembrance is altogether more tender and more personal, by reason of his beautiful morning and evening hymns. It is related that at every sunrise he used to sing a morning hymn to the accompaniment of his lute; the corner of the gardens is still pointed

out, where he is supposed to have walked to and fro as he wrote his earnest devotional lyrics—not without borrowing suggestions from that rich Latin hymnology which no other school of religious thought has been able to rival. Ken's name shines brightly in an age when there were not many such. Though one of the Seven Bishops, he was equally true to his conscience later, and having sworn allegiance to James, refused to take oath to William III. For this he was deprived of his living, dying peacefully in retirement, to be buried, not at Wells as one might have wished, but at Frome. He was succeeded by Bishop Kidder, of whom we chiefly remember that he and his wife were killed by the fall of a chimney-stack during the memorable storm of 1703, and his heirs were sued for the consequent dilapidation.

Even those who do not gain admission within the enclosure of this lovely residence do not lose everything. The public walk along the sides of the moat affords enough beauty to satisfy anyone, and it is a beauty not limited to times or seasons; there is always charm here, even on the dull days when skies are grey, or when the water is strewn with the late leaves of November. We can step immediately from the market square, with its stirrings of life, its old inns and attractive shops, its civic offices and business houses, to this quiet boulevard by the living water—



THE PALACE GATEHOUSE AND DRAWBRIDGE, WELLS

alive because it is always flowing. The swans glide placidly on its surface, and the place is a continual haunt of birds. On our left is a popular recreation ground; in front stretch undulating meadows, with a pathway leading to the Shepton road. Or we can join that pleasant road more quickly by passing along the south side of the moat, and so proceed to Dulcote and Dinder, or farther yet to Croscombe. Dulcote is an attractive little hamlet with its own ever-flowing wells, and a sharp height above from which we win the loveliest views. Here we can note the distant dreamy charm of the cathedral, not rising stark and bare but amid a fair setting of trees. Westward is the Brue Level and the valley of the Axe; to the south-west, like a sentinel, rises Glastonbury Tor; on a clear day far Exmoor heights may be seen.

But there are some things still to be seen in Wells itself, before we should pass on to Glastonbury. Let us return to the spacious cathedral close, and, leaving it on its north side, pass under the Chain Gate to the Vicars' Close; the approach, with the cathedral on our left, is exceptionally beautiful. This gate and its covered bridge were built by Beckington in the year 1459, as a private passage from the minster to the residences of the canons' vicars; the houses themselves being the work of Bishop Ralph, about a century earlier. A good deal of restoration has been committed on them,

but the high chimneys are clearly a part of the original design, and in some cases retain their old escutcheons. It is a most peaceful and lovable spot for habitation, and one can but envy the theological students who now chiefly occupy it, their presence making it somewhat like a corner of Oxford. There is an impression that this Close was devoted entirely to the use of the lay-clerks or vicars-choral of the cathedral; but though these doubtless shared its occupation, the word Vicar had a wider significance—it applied to the assistant or clerical deputies of the canons, just as in present-day ecclesiastical law the vicar is the deputy of the rector. The beautiful little chapel at the farther end of the Close was originally the private chapel of the vicars, and is now used by the students; there is also a fourteenth-century dining-hall above the gateway. Retracing the road that runs under this gateway, we see the old archdeaconry, now the library of the college, and once the home of Polydore Vergil, who was archdeacon here in 1508, but whose name, familiar to scholars, rouses few associations in the mind of the average visitor. The Deanery, close by, cannot fitly be seen from the road; it is a fine building, dating from the days of Dean Gunthorpe—that is to say, the close of the fifteenth century. Henry VII was entertained here when he passed through Wells in his pursuit of Perkin Warbeck, one of the few historic memories of the

little town; others being a visit from Charles I, and the depredations committed on the cathedral, later, by the troops of the Duke of Monmouth. It is a popular fallacy that attributes all church mutilations to Cromwell's men.

If we recross the Close, we can leave the cathedral precincts by the Penniless Gate—so called, apparently, because it was a place of almsgiving; or we can pass into Sadler Street, and so to the marketplace, through the gate known as Browne's. But there is nothing particularly attractive in the streets of Wells, except the runlets of water in their gutters. The houses are quite ordinary, one may almost say mean in some cases; many a village has fairer dwelling-places. But there is the very fine church of St. Cuthbert's, north of which are the Bubwith Almshouses, referred to by Leland as "an hospital of twenty-four poore menne and wyemen". The church of St. Cuthbert is so imposing and spacious that a hasty stranger might almost at first sight mistake it for the cathedral; an impression not altogether lost when we enter the building. Of course there is nothing really cathedralian about it; it is a Perpendicular transformation of an Early English parochial church, occupying the site of a much earlier Saxon oratory. The existing tower with its double windows, though it may not be in perfect proportion, is a magnificent specimen in the well-known Somerset style. The church

has an excellent panelled oak roof and oak pulpit, double transepts, in the southern of which is a Decorated window with Jesse altarpiece, chantries, chambered porches, and an aisled chancel. It is still a spacious and must once have been a splendid edifice; and, though much despoiled, has not been ruined. That so small a town should have not only its glorious minster, but this fine parochial church (and other churches as well, to say nothing of chapels), is one of those incongruities that we meet with in England. Wells was never much if at all bigger than it is now; we must remember that it is a town created by a cathedral—the exact contrary of some of our minster cities. And here, as at Bath, we may attribute the settlement to these waters that come bubbling from the roots of the Mendips. Both towns are children of the hills; it is the younger that now seems the more ancient in spirit. If we find old Rome underlying the streets of Bath, so also we find Rome underlying the origins of Wells; it was Rome that converted the Saxons, and led them to establish minsters such as this. But at Glastonbury, a few miles across the rich plains, we shall find Christianity of an earlier birth; we shall be back once more in the twilight of myth and legend.

Those who wish to explore this side of the Mendips, or the low-lying country at their western base, can hardly do better than make Wells their centre.



PENNILESS GATE, WELLS

Wookey Hole is only about two miles distant, and has its old tradition of a witch who was changed into a stone by the incantations of a priest from Glastonbury. This cavern, which rivals those of Cheddar, is the source of the river Axe, which has therefore not a long course to run before joining the Severn Sea at Uphill, probably the Roman *Ischalis*. More than half a century since many bones of cave beasts and cave men were discovered here; the beasts included bear and lion, hyæna, rhinoceros, mammoth, bison, and elephant. Cheddar itself is six or seven miles to the north-west, and to many its glorious gorge is more attractive than even the famous caves. But those who love to grope among the dark roots of the hills cannot do better than come to Cheddar, and may excite themselves with a vague wondering how many similar lofty chambers lie concealed among these heights. Even this gorge is supposed to have been once a huge covered way whose roof has fallen in. But after the fairest excursion, most persons will be glad to find themselves back in the peaceful atmosphere of Wells, within hearing of its chime and running waters—watching sunset flame on the western front, or the slow light of dawn gradually emphasizing the outline of the beautiful towers.

GLASTONBURY

Whether we come to Glastonbury in a spirit of faith, which some will name credulity, or whether we come doubting and denying, we shall still find it a lovely ruin in a spot of great beauty. There are some who would have this ruin restored; others are content for it to remain as it is. At Bath some may wish that the flood of eighteenth-century fashion might return to it—that they might see its streets and ball-rooms just as they were in the reign of Beau Nash; which we know to be impossible. But those who desire the restoration of Glastonbury are not wishing the impossible: a great settlement of monks might gather here once more; the ruined abbey might be restored, just as the great church at Buckfastleigh has been restored under Benedictine rule. Human nature being what it is, we must differ in our view of the desirability of such change. At present, of these three places that once contended for supremacy, we find Wells and Bath still alive, each in its own fashion, but Glastonbury is a dead thing, except for the natural beauty that enwraps it, in which the divine life ever manifests itself. Perhaps there is no spot in old England so haunted by legend as this

peaceful low-lying district of the south-west, with its Tor rising high as a memorial and a landmark. The waters of the Severn once flowed to the foot of this hill, and of Wirrall or Weary-All; at least, the country was so given up to marshes where now drained by "rhines" that high tides must always have flooded it; and so we hear of the Island of Avalon. It is now a fair countryside of meadows and orchards, old-world homesteads, sunny and fragrant gardens, touched by the railway yet remote from general lines of travel, but still a place of pilgrimage. The earliest associations of British Christianity cling to it, at least in tradition; and we can certainly know that Celtic Christianity here joined hands with Latin, so that there was an actual continuity without a break. For the Saxon invader, when he reached Glastonbury, had become Christianized, so that he did not destroy, he perpetuated. A very ancient legend says that a certain Joseph with twelve companions settled at Avalon, establishing a church there; and very soon it became believed that this Joseph was the Arimathean. Taking this supposition as fact, precedence was given to our bishops by the Council of Constance, in the year 1414, as representing the senior church of Christendom. It was a proud boast, which has been scorned by ruthless historians; and indeed, if we believe it, we must do so in an imaginative way, without asking for

chapter and text. But we must not go to the ruined abbey for the site of St. Joseph's Chapel, if we accept the tradition; the position of this would have been either on the Tor, or on Wirrall Hill, where his staff took root and blossomed. An offshoot of this blossoming thorn still thrives here, and has done much to strengthen the faith of those with whom seeing is believing; what is the use of telling persons that Joseph never came to Glastonbury when here is his thorn still alive? With Joseph also came the Holy Grail, the vessel from which Christ drank at the Last Supper:

And there awhile it bode; and if a man
Could touch or see it, he was healed at once
By faith of all his ills. But then the times
Grew to such evil that the holy cup
Was caught away to heaven and disappeared.

It is all linked with the most romantic, as also probably the most mythical period of British history; for the glamour of Arthur's story has been added to Glastonbury—not far distant is the neighbourhood of Cadbury and the Camels, so easy to identify (but always doubtfully) with the fabled Camelot. It was to Avalon also, tradition tells, that Arthur was brought after his last battle, to heal him of his wounds. The Isle of Avalon assumed the character of a fortunate isle, an island of the blest, in old-time stories; it was



EW. HASLEHUST.

DOORWAY OF CHAPEL OF ST. MARY, GLASTONBURY ABBEY

mystical, remote, visionary—there must have been an invisible Avalon as well as a visible: it was to this invisible isle that Arthur was carried in the black barge that took him from the shore. When the right moment came, he was to return to his people and once more lead them to victory over their enemies.

All this is romance, though there may be a spirit of truth in things romantic; more tangible is the fact that a small church was built of wattles from the marshes, some time early in the days of Roman England, and this was the germ of Glastonbury. Somewhat doubtful authority says that it was already spoken of as “the old church” in the year 601; and other dubious traditions state that Gildas and the far greater St. Patrick were buried here. That a Patrick came to Glastonbury seems indisputable, but it may not have been the apostle of Ireland; there were other Patricks. However, we know that when the Saxons of Wessex spread their conquests to include this district, King Ine found a wooden church on the spot, which he converted into a monastery, somewhere near the year 704. It may have been monastic before, but after the Celtic fashion. An apparently early Welsh triad speaks of Avalon as one of the three “perpetual choirs of the island of Britain”, the other two being Salisbury and Bangor; this means that service was sung without ceasing throughout the twenty-four hours

of each day—a perpetual adoration. Legend has added the name of Dewi, or St. David, patron saint of Wales, to those associated with Glastonbury; but the local monk of whose virile humanity we can feel most sure in the church's history is Dunstan, who was born near by and was educated at the abbey. The establishment must have already attained celebrity, for kings had begun to lay their bones within its walls. Dunstan became abbot in 940, and, though always more of a statesman than a churchman, he did much to enhance the power and wealth of his charge. It was while studying at Glastonbury that he is said to have tweaked the devil by the nose—a proof of familiar scorn that has ensured his lasting popularity. It was Dunstan who established the full Benedictine rule here; he did great things for the abbey before called to be the country's primate. Other Glastonbury men, before and after, attained the same rank; the abbey seemed becoming so strong, politically, as to be almost a menace to the throne. Much earlier than this, it is reported that Ine chose Wells as the site of his canons' college, in order that the new settlement might do something to watch and check the monks of Avalon. When the Normans came, something further was done to bridle what was felt to be a perilous influence, and there was some trouble at first; but it only meant that Glastonbury soon became

as powerful as and more magnificent than before. The first of the Norman re-erections was destroyed by fire, but we have a survival of the second in the remains known as St. Joseph's Chapel, really dedicated to the Virgin. This is exactly on the site of the supposed shrine of St. Joseph—on what is therefore traditionally the most sacred spot in Britain, the grave of one who had travelled hither after direct personal contact with Christ.

The building was of rectangular design, Transitional or Romanesque in style. The rich shafts of Purbeck marble have gone, but enough remains to show the fine adornment and the enduring loveliness lavished upon it. This was done with the help of Henry II, but at his death the work slackened. Troubled times followed, and probably little was done till the days of Abbot Michael, who was elected in 1225. A great event was the visit of Edward I and his queen in 1278, during Holy Week and Easter, when the archbishop attended, probably to consecrate part of the new building, and certainly to deposit the supposed remains of Arthur and Guinevere before the high altar. It was left to Abbot Sodbury to complete the great church and to throw open the Lady Chapel as an integral part. Abbot Monington was the next notable builder, adding two bays to the choir, completing its vaulting, and beginning the Chapter-house.

The Abbot's Kitchen, practically the only part of the domestic monastery that survives even in ruin, belongs to somewhere about 1440. Abbot Beere, whose rule ran well into the sixteenth century, did a good deal of restoration, added the Edgar Chapel, and is said to have underpropped the tower with inverted arches like those at Wells. Decay at least did a good work in destroying these. At this time the abbey was at the height of its wealth and magnificence, being only exceeded by the vast establishment of St. Albans; and when the suppression came, in the days of the next and last abbot, it was natural that greedy eyes and grasping hands were ready to do their work. The abbot was one of the four Lords Royal of Mendip, many of whose manors belonged to him; he had, in fact, all the wealth and more than the power of a great prince. The abbey was famed far and near for its educational excellence; many of England's primates had been its scholars, of whom there were usually about three hundred lads; and besides its many estates it was constantly being enriched by the thousands of pilgrims who came to St. Joseph's shrine. At the Dissolution it was to prove one of the richest spoils. But Abbot Whiting, the last of a great succession, did not at first fall into disfavour; the first visitation found little to complain of. Some years elapsed—the authorities were busy elsewhere; but

at the fit time excuses were found for a second visitation. During this there appears to have been much concealment of valuables; the rich abbey produced only what would have been expected of a parish church; and no doubt abbot as well as monks were guilty of what to the lay mind appeared like deception and theft. It is not quite clear what was the actual charge; that which is treason from one view is virtue from another; to put the matter most favourably, the Abbot of Glastonbury had been more loyal to his religion than to his king. It may be admitted that technically he was a traitor; it is asserted that he had misappropriated part of the abbey's property; and at his trial by Cromwell himself in London it is certain that Lord Russell, a man of blameless reputation, agreed with the findings of his judges. A further trial awaited him in the hall of the Bishop's Palace at Wells, where he was convicted of felony and sentenced to death. It seems certain that he was not popular in Somerset, where many charges were laid against him; but in any case his execution was a cruel blunder, and naturally many regard it as a bloodthirsty crime. On 15 November, 1539, he was carried on a hurdle to the top of Glastonbury Tor, and there hanged with two other monks. This is the memory that now clings to the Tor, rising to a height of 500 feet and crowned by its isolated tower of St.

Michael, at whose foot St. Joseph is said to have buried the Holy Grail. It is a notable landmark with a glorious view; below stretch the fields and moors reaching to the Channel; there is a lovely peep of Wells; on one side extend the Mendips, on the other the Quantocks. There is said to have been an oratory on this hill from the second century; the present tower survives from the fourteenth. The glory of the scene will not draw our minds entirely from thinking of St. Joseph, of St. Patrick, and of King Arthur, whose associations with the spot may perhaps be mythical; but we shall also think of that aged abbot who on a dismal November day was here hanged in full view of the rich domains that had once been his. And whatever our own creed may be, whatever our opinion as to the suppression of the monasteries, we shall regard that execution as a foul deed. But we cannot quite judge a man by his end, and we may have doubts whether the manner of Abbot Whiting's death justified his beatification in the year 1896. That, however, is not our business.

Such was the finish of the long abbacy, and the beginning of the present ruin. The riches were scattered, much of course finding its way to the royal coffers; the buildings fell into decay and their stones were used for road mending. The manors were similarly scattered; and in 1907 the ruins came by pur-

chase to the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who is probably their most fitting guardian. They will be preserved for their present loveliness and their great memories; any attempt at restoration must be a mistake, because in some measure a sham, a mere imitation. The reality cannot be restored; we are in the twentieth century and cannot return to the fifteenth. In such a case as this of Glastonbury the break in continuity would be fatal.

Of the ruins we have already noticed the most striking, those of St. Mary's chapel, known as St. Joseph's; the remains of the greater church are only fragmentary and of later date, though not discordant in style. This vast Benedictine church of St. Peter and St. Paul extended 580 feet (including the chapel) in its length; it consisted of a high nave of ten bays, choir of three bays, transepts, and great central tower. Cloisters and cloister-garden were to the south. There was evidently an ascent from nave to choir. Little remains now but the massive yet graceful piers of the chancel-arch, with some small portions of wall; enough to be eloquent of the past, enough to enable us to trace foundations and outlines, guessing with more or less imagination at the state of this abbey when its fortunes were fairest. Ivies mantle the ruins, and the richest of soft verdure paves their floor; a haunt of many visitors, some few of whom come still in the

spirit of pilgrimage, while many come simply to see a noted sight. Glastonbury has long been popular for choir outings and similar functions, and is often linked with Wells in a single day's activities. To see Wells and Glastonbury in one day is suggestive of the formal "doing" a thing, in the rapid tourist style. We want more leisure than that if we would understand anything of this old abbey, and perhaps more reverence. For however we may look at it, historically, traditionally, or ecclesiastically, Glastonbury must ever be a hallowed spot, one of the holy places of our land, its story a vivid page of our country's annals. Religious and secular history have been wrought here, with priceless gifts to legend and literature.

When we leave the grassy enclosure of the ruins and ramble through the little town, we find other enduring traces of the abbey which is still its chief support. Perhaps the finest of these, in excellent preservation, is the George Hotel, formerly the Pilgrims' Inn or *novum hospitium*, built for the purpose of entertaining the many who came to the noted shrine. Its front is very much as Abbot Selwood left it, more than four hundred years since; as Mr. Heath says, "it is a very decorative piece of building, richly ornamented with shields of arms, carvings, and the other architectural conceits of the fifteenth century. The majority of the windows are later insertions." There



GLASTONBURY TOR FROM THE PLAIN OF AVALON

had long been rumours of secret passages leading from this hostel to the quarters of the abbots, and any doubt on this matter has recently been set at rest; there were undeniably such passages. We need not enquire too curiously for what purpose they were intended, but of course scandals have been freely suggested. In the same street is the Tribunal, the old courthouse of the abbots, fairly well preserved from the days of Abbot Beere. These princely churchmen enjoyed a wide jurisdiction, not only as landlords but as judges. It was the same abbot that founded the almshouse and chapel in Magdalen Street; he also restored the earlier church of St. Benignus, of which the existing north porch and western tower are his work, as evidenced by the jug of beer carved on the battlements and the initials on the porch. The market cross is modern, but on an ancient site. Far more striking is the church of St. John in the High Street, with its fine tower of the familiar Somerset Perpendicular; Freeman thought this should rank next to Wrington and St. Cuthbert's, Wells. It was on the site of a Norman church that Abbot Selwood erected this, in 1465. There are some interesting monuments, especially that of John Camel, now placed in the south aisle of the nave. The three-storied and double-windowed tower, with its graceful pinnacles, rises to the height of 140 feet. Within there are timber supports of the chancel-arch, which may

be better than inverted arches but are not a beauty. The eastern window is good, as is also the stone carved pulpit; on the whole this church is worthy of its neighbourhood. Another relic of the great days is the very fine Abbot's Barn in Bere Lane, remarkably like a church, being cruciform with traceried windows and effigied gables. This dates from the fourteenth century and is one of the best conventual barns in existence. Thus everything at Glastonbury has its story of the past to tell us, though its pilgrims are now chiefly sightseers and its visitors are no longer housed in the George Inn at the abbot's expense. The town can also boast of a small museum, memorable for its curiosities brought from the lake-dwellings at Godney, about two miles distant. We have noted the former marshy condition of the district, in those dim days when Avalon was an island of the blest; and these dwellers on pile-supported floorings came later than the cave men, being probably Celts of some two thousand years since. Their huts in the marsh-land were palisaded; they cultivated the soil, practised spinning and weaving, and made themselves weapons of iron. Around Meare also, and elsewhere on these lowlands, have been found traces of lake-dwellings, deeply interesting to the imagination but not now presenting much to the eye. They recall an age before the first wattled church had been raised here, but when the isle of

Avalon was already a sacred place, so sacred as to have become mythologic. This is the very heart of Somerset, true and largely unspoiled old England, eloquent with traditions not only of the great monastery, but of King Arthur whose story is a poem, and of King Alfred's noble stand against the invading Danes. When the countryside is brooding in fragrant summer warmth among its gardens and orchards, the spot is beautiful and satisfying even without its recollections; there are times when nature alone is enough, without the humanizing and sometimes disturbing touch of man's doings and struggles. To some it may be that the whole neighbourhood is saddened by the fate of the old abbey; but, whatever our standpoint may be, we need not let that chequered story and ultimate downfall distress us. Whatever good and whatever truth the abbey stood for, that good and that truth must survive; faith, if it be vital, does not depend on the upbuilding or the downcasting of a few stones. We do not wish to see all our minsters overthrown, far from it; but there ought to be something within us more imperishable than stones and mortar—something that once sought its expression in these visible symbols of adoration and aspiration, and that may now seek it otherwise. Each age has its own mode of utterance; we cannot say that architecture now is ours. Neither, perhaps, is so definite a faith as was once thus formu-

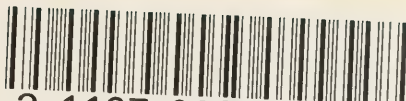
lated. But the truly spiritual, and therefore that which alone is enduring, must survive all suppressions and revolutions, all changes of outward manifestation.

Such is the condition of the visible Glastonbury. What of the invisible? Shall we say that it is gone in even more irreparable ruin; or shall we say with Fiona Macleod that "Avalon is not a dream—it is with us still"? If its name mean the "isle of apples", the apples may still be plucked in fair Somerset orchards; but there was that mystic apple whose taste brought contentment and vision—is that still to be gathered? Can we still find an island of the blest amid these pastures and fruit-fields, an island now washed by waves of green grass instead of lapping waters? Bath has had its message, which is intensely human; Wells perhaps tried to show us more of the visible divine. Is the secret of Glastonbury something deeper still, something more of the unseen, belonging to that dim and unravished sanctuary of our spirits "where falls not hail or rain or any snow"? Of the key to this mystic region nothing can deprive us, if we possess it; if we have it not, the place, like any other, is merely a scene of grassy fields and swelling hillsides, lovely enough, but yet lacking a soul.

BATH AND WELLS

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